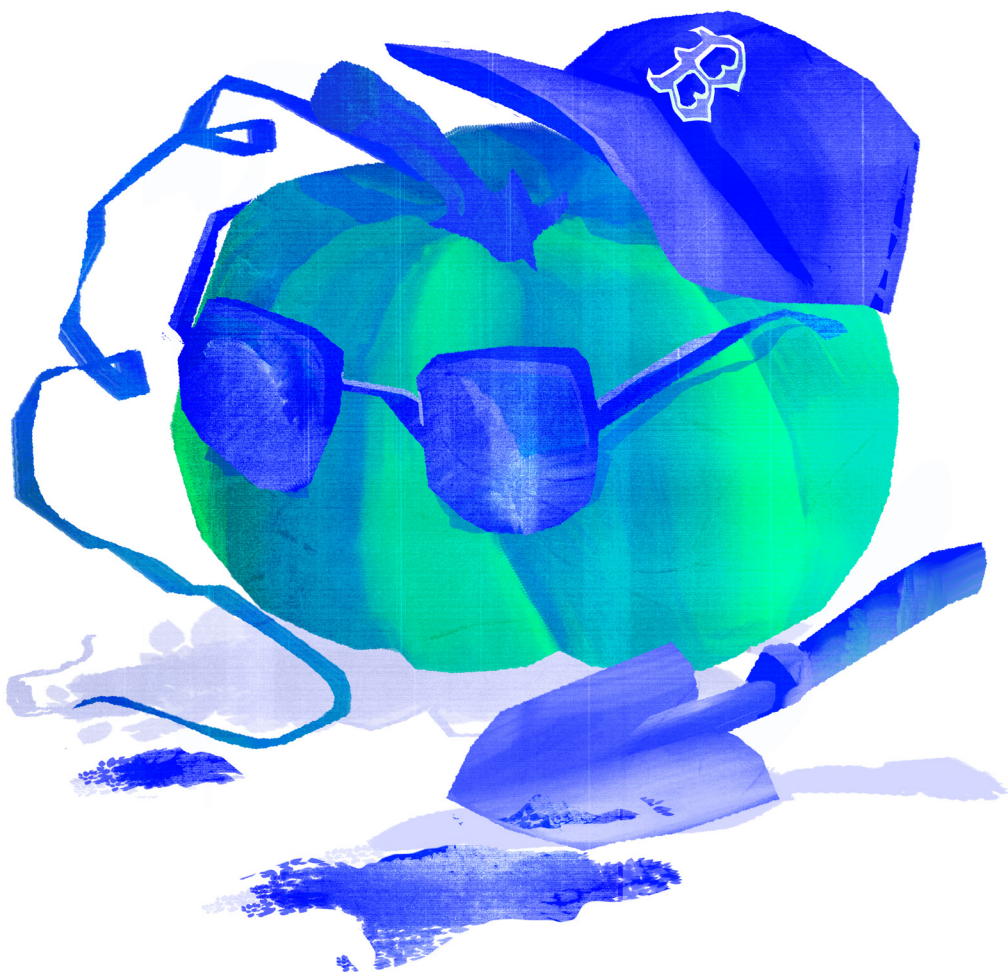


# GREEN COMMONS: A GUIDE TO URBAN AGRICULTURE IN BOSTON



Green Commons in the City

**2025**



## WHAT IS THIS DOCUMENT?

This zine was prepared by the students of *Green Commons in the City*, a class in MIT's School of Architecture and Planning, co-taught by Justin Brazier, Calvin Zhong, and Kate Brown in spring of 2025. In this document, we trace the nuances of urban agriculture regulations in the City of Boston, detail entry points to urban agriculture, and begin to paint a picture of why urban agriculture exists where it does, and how future farmers might access City of Boston resources.

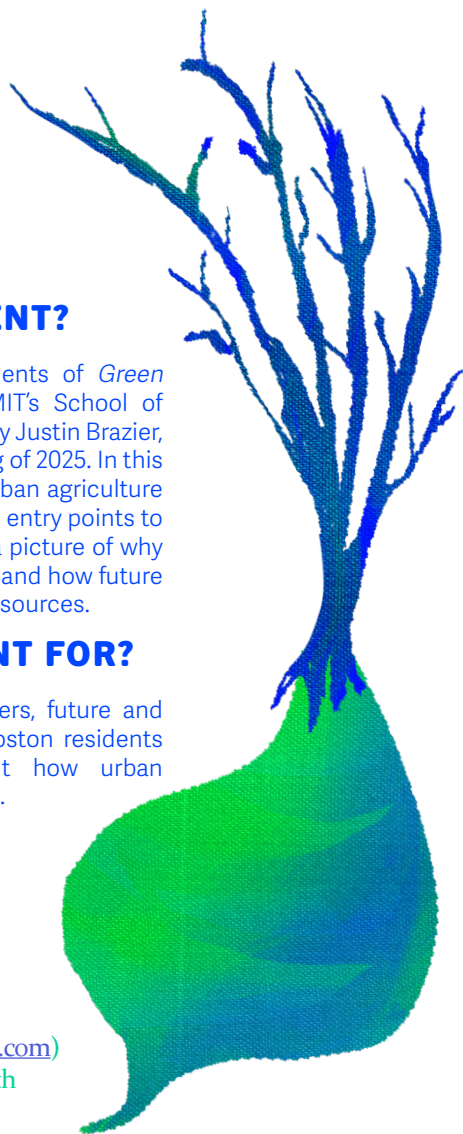
## WHO IS THIS DOCUMENT FOR?

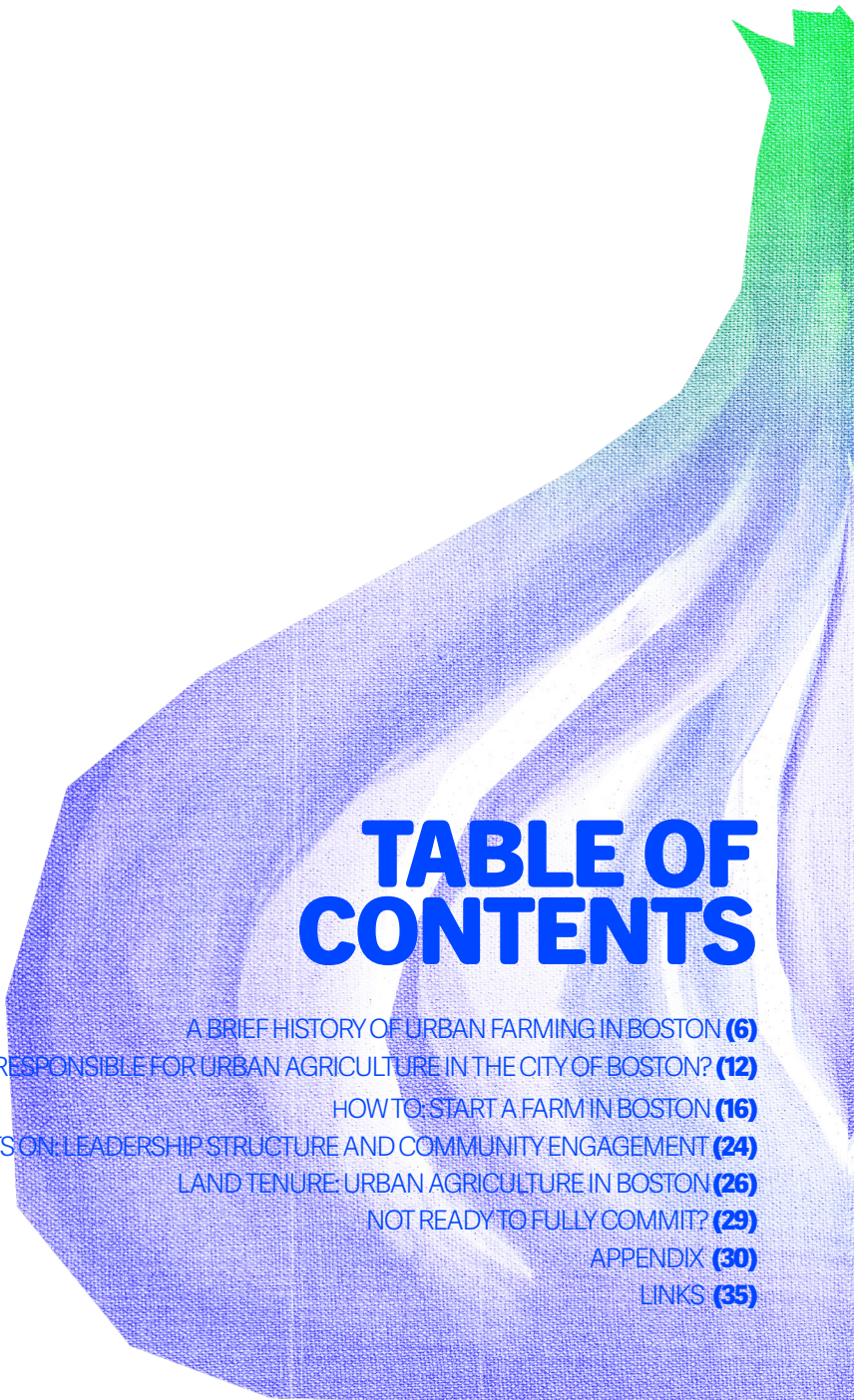
We compiled this zine for policymakers, future and current urban farmers, and City of Boston residents interested in learning more about how urban agriculture works in their communities.

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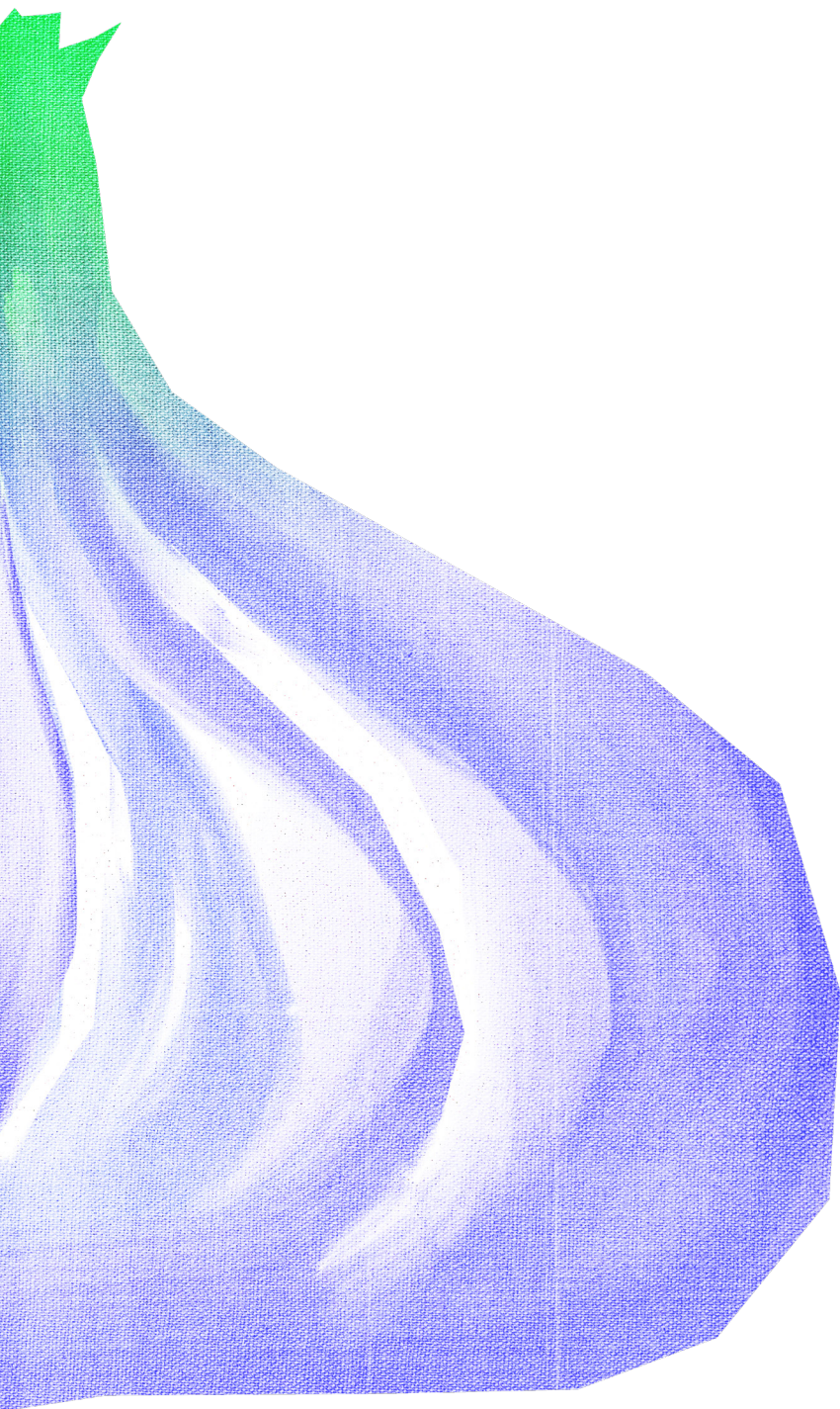




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Jim Hall with sunflower, Sullivan Square, Charlestown. Taken by Julie Stone.

## A BRIEF HISTORY OF URBAN FARMING IN BOSTON

Boston has a decades-long history of grassroots urban agriculture initiatives. Following World Wars I and II, community gardens were important across America. So-called “Victory Gardens,” which often received federal funding in the early days, made up 40 percent of vegetable production in 1944, according to the USDA. Funding dried up over the years, but Boston’s victory gardens managed to survive, despite general agricultural decline across the state of Massachusetts in the 1960s.<sup>1</sup>

The first formal urban agriculture recognition by the City of Boston was spearheaded by state

1. “Time for Victory Gardens Again? | Tellus.” Accessed September 4, 2025. <https://tellus.ars.usda.gov/stories/articles/time-victory-gardens-again>.

.....  
In 1972, Massachusetts' Article 97 was passed, establishing the right of Massachusetts citizens to a "clean environment," including the natural, scenic, historical, and aesthetic qualities.  
.....

2. Sörbom, Caroline. "A History of Boston's Community Gardens." Bluedot Living, April 10, 2024. <https://bluedotliving.com/a-history-of-bostons-community-gardens/>.

representative Mel King in the 1970s. King's political effort was built upon his earlier advocacy in the 1960s during a period of urban renewal in Boston. Through his organization, Community Assembly for a United South End (CAUSE), King organized communities in the South End to fight for affordable housing and the working class.<sup>2</sup>

Following the 1974 state ruling for *Morgan v. Hennigan*, which ordered the integration of Boston public by busing, racial violence broke out. Also in 1974, King passed the Massachusetts Gardening and Farm Act, which enabled gardeners to utilize public vacant land at no cost. While much of the vacant land in Boston was privately held, this played a role in the development of gardening organizations across the city, like the Boston Urban Gardeners (BUGs).

In 1976, BUGs formed as a rainbow coalition to collectively push for change, while farming on the formerly vacant land and educating community members in the South End, Roxbury, Jamaica Plain and Dorchester. Urban farming continued to grow in Boston for the next few decades.

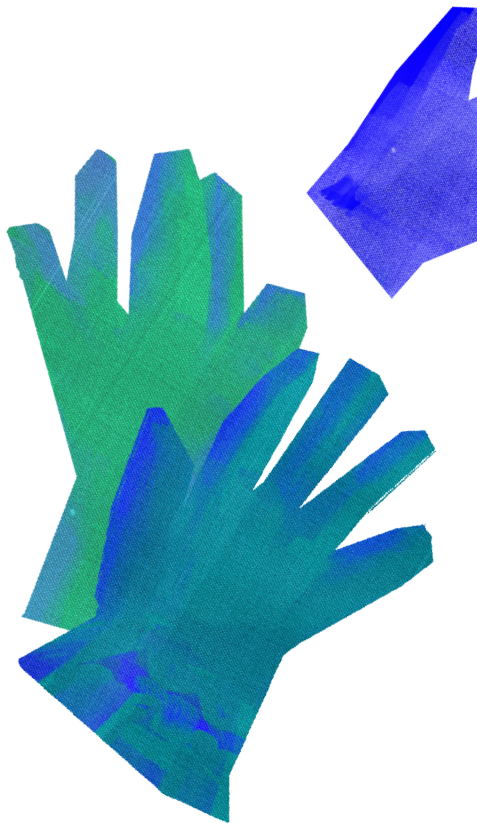
In 1979, the state of Massachusetts began implementing the Agricultural Preservation Restriction Program, spurred by earlier legislative efforts. Through this program, farmers that held "prime" growing land were paid by the state in exchange for a permanent deed restriction that would prevent future property uses that might damage agricultural land.

In the 1990s, the Grassroots Open Space Program was established in Boston's Mayor's Office of Housing. This is the predecessor to what is now known as GrowBoston.

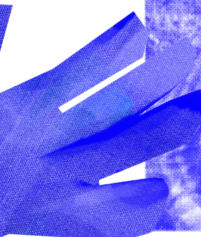
In 1996, Boston's Article 80 was passed. Article 80 outlines development review and zoning code change processes for the City of Boston. This article was recently updated to provide greater transparency, predictability, timeliness, and consistency to the development review and zoning change process.

In 2009, the City Growers Cooperative was founded by Glynn Lloyd (later co-directing the Urban Farming Institute), which co-developed Boston's zoning regulations around urban agriculture, Article 89. This established urban agriculture as an accepted and encouraged use of Boston's land and laid the foundation for today's growing culture in Boston. In 2013, Boston's Article 89 was passed.

In 2023, GrowBoston and Boston's Office of Food Justice were established.







Top: Domingo Fernandez stands besides the “Handicapped Garden” in Boston’s Fenway neighborhood, 1991. Bottom: Group gathers around fir tree, 1983.

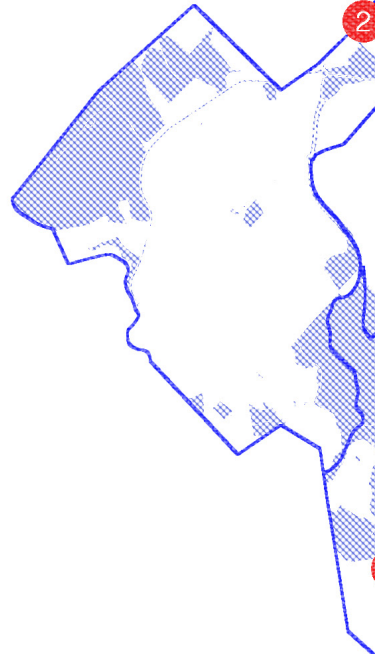


There are ~ 8 acres of  
farmland in Boston—  
acres of open space  
would make up just 0  
space!

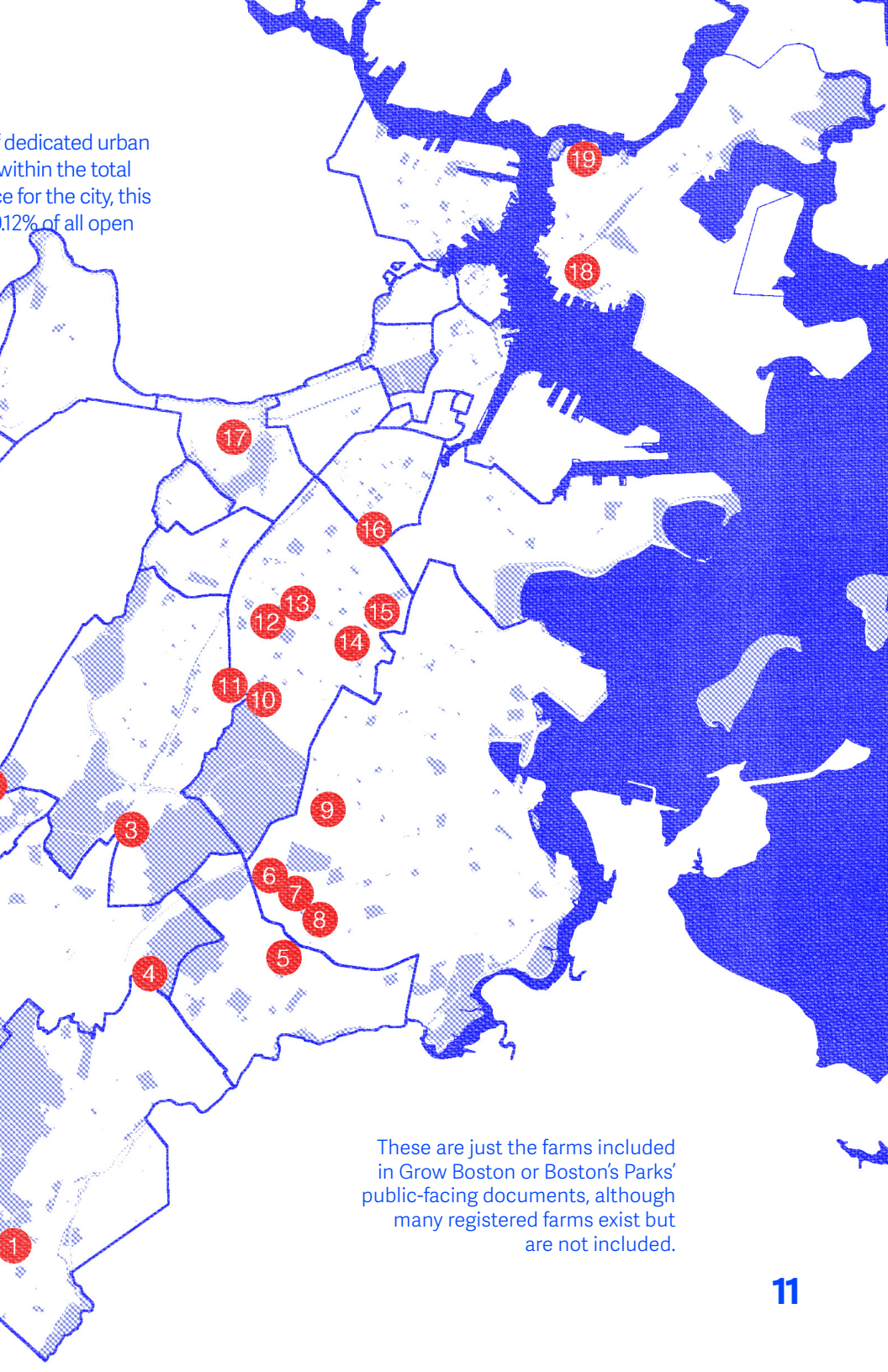


## CURRENT “EXISTING” URBAN FARMS (AS OF 2025)

1. We Grow Microgreens
2. Allandale Farm
3. Revision Urban Farm
4. Astoria Farm
5. Fowler Creek Farm
6. Revision Urban Farm
7. NUBIA
8. Ballou Urban Farm
9. Glenway Farm
10. Garrison-Trotter Farm
11. NUBIA
12. Thornton Street Farm
13. Tommy's Rock Farm
14. The West Cottage Farm
15. Langdon Street Farm
16. Boston Medical Center
17. Fenway Park Farm
18. Eastie Farm
19. Corner Stalk Farm



dedicated urban  
within the total  
for the city, this  
12% of all open



These are just the farms included  
in Grow Boston or Boston's Parks'  
public-facing documents, although  
many registered farms exist but  
are not included.



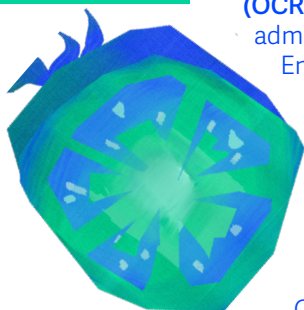
# **WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR URBAN AGRICULTURE IN THE CITY OF BOSTON?**

## AGENCIES @ THE CITY OF BOSTON

**GROWBOSTON CONTACT**  
growboston@boston.gov  
617-635-3880

**OFJ CONTACT**  
food@boston.gov  
617-635-3717

**OCR CONTACT**  
climate.resilience@boston.gov  
617-635-2854



**PARKS CONTACT**  
parks@boston.gov  
617-635-4505

**GrowBoston** is the office of urban agriculture for the City of Boston. Its mandate is to increase food production and support local food producers in Boston. The office supports urban agriculture in Boston with technical help, educational resources, grants, and coordination “between agents.”

**The Mayor’s Office of Food Justice (OFJ)** works hand-in-hand with GrowBoston, but focuses on food distribution and connecting producers with low-income, food-insecure communities.<sup>3</sup>

**The Office of Climate Resilience (OCR)** originated under Mayor Wu’s administration by mandate of the Environment, Energy and Open Space Cabinet. OCR’s goals include accelerating the citywide response to climate challenges and coordinating departments across the City to deliver critical projects that make the city more livable under climate change.

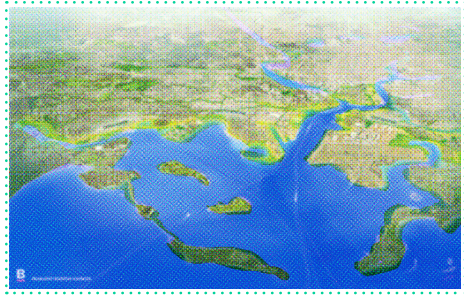
OCR is involved in the City’s Open Space and Recreation plans, where heat mitigation, stormwater management, and land conservation overlap with urban agricultural goals and outcomes.

**Boston Parks** owns nearly 2,200 acres of public, permanently protected open space and maintains them as clean, safe, and accessible. Some community gardens are held within the Parks’ inventory, as well as a few community gardens.

3. Edible Boston. “Boston Is Growing: Mayor Wu’s GrowBoston and Office of Food Justice Unveil Edible Options.” September 19, 2022. <https://www.edibleboston.com/blog/2022/9/14/boston-is-growing-mayor-wus-growboston-and-office-of-food-justice-unveil-edible-options>.



**The Planning Department,** formerly the Boston Planning and Development Agency (BPDA), was established during Mayor Michelle Wu's administration. The department is made up of divisions, including Planning and Zoning, Urban Design, Research, Real Estate, Procurement, and GIS Lab. The Planning and Zoning Department manages short- and long-term planning at the hyper-local, neighborhood, and city-wide scales. The department also manages planning initiatives, such as Squares and Streets. Articles 80 and 89 are established by Planning Department zoning documents.



Boston Harbor Vision. 2023. City of Boston.

**PLANNING CONTACT**  
**617-722-4300**

## MASSACHUSETTS-WIDE REGULATIONS

*Article 97* establishes the right of Massachusetts citizens to a "clean environment," including the natural, scenic, historical, and aesthetic qualities. This falls under the governance of Massachusetts state regulation.



## CITY OF BOSTON-WIDE REGULATIONS

Proposed urban farms are subject to Comprehensive Farm Review to ensure that farms are sited with respect to surrounding neighborhood contexts.

Existing farms are subject to farm review only if they are greater than 10,000 square feet and seeking to increase their size by at least 30% of the existing area.

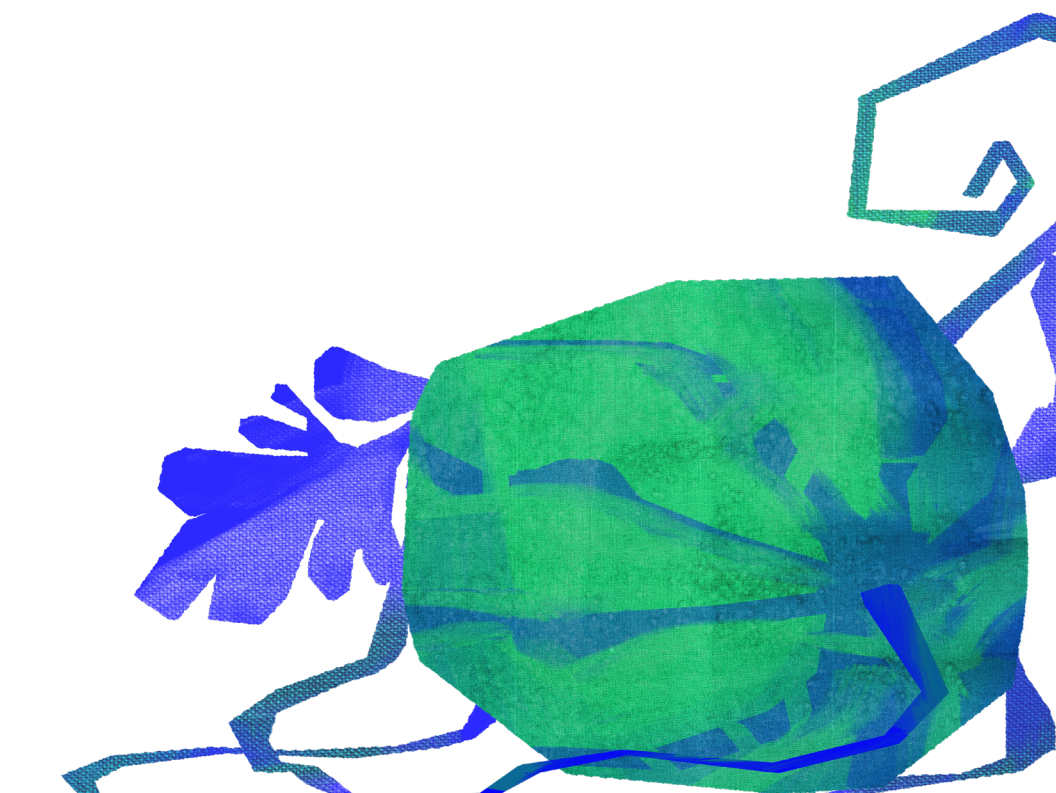
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\* An urban agriculture activity is defined as the cultivation of plants and horticultural crops; other uses may be subject to permitting.

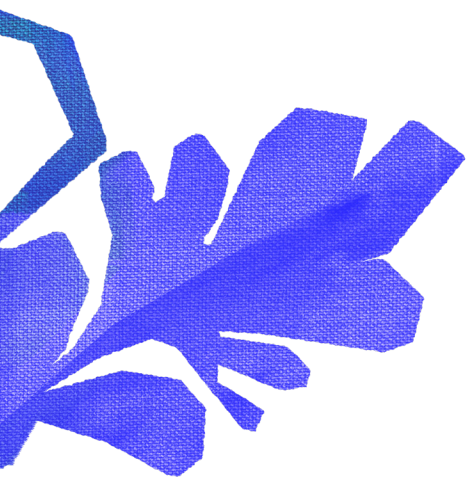
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*Article 89* establishes zoning regulations for the operation of urban agriculture\* and specifies standards for the siting, design, maintenance, and modification of urban agriculture activities. It aims to address public safety and minimize the impacts on residents and “historic resources” in the city of Boston.

*Article 80* outlines the updated development review and zoning code change process, and aims to improve the process’ predictability, timeliness, transparency, and consistency. This article is within Boston governance. The updated article also outlines how these processes should have more accessible community engagement, simplified standards for new proposals, and a faster, sequential review.



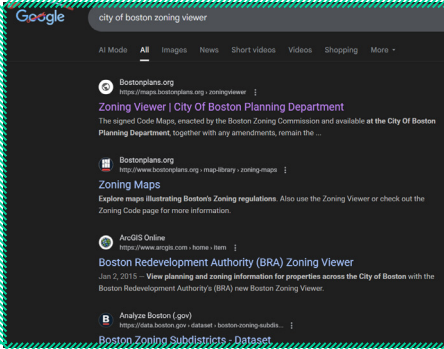
# HOW TO: START A FARM IN BOSTON



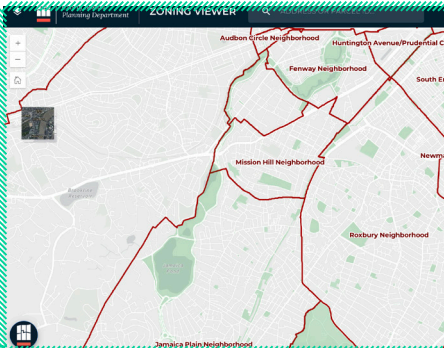
*Throughout this guide, we offer considerations and recommendations. It is not required that you follow all our advice to set up a farm in Boston! We aim to clarify some of the mysteries in the city's various policy apparatuses so that you can better understand what suits you and your farming project. If our suggestions feel overwhelming, please skip ahead to page 24 for off-ramps and alternatives to starting an urban farm.*

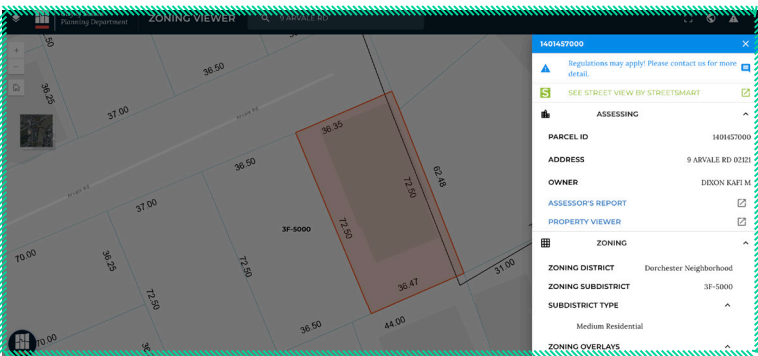


# FIRST. KNOW YOUR LOT!



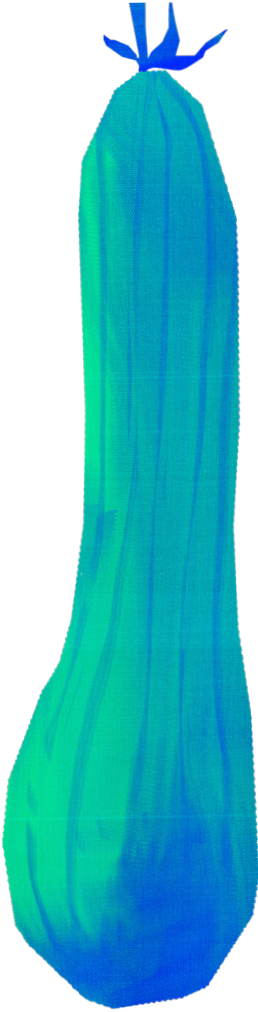
Using the City of Boston's online Zoning Viewer, you are able to assess all information relating to a lot's property ownership and zoning information. Just enter your current or prospective lot's address to begin! If the information provided is insufficient, read on to find appropriate contacts and information regarding how you can best utilize your lot's assessment status.





1401457000	
	Regulations may apply! Please contact us for more detail.
	SEE STREET VIEW BY STREETSMART
	ASSESSING
PARCEL ID	1401457000
ADDRESS	9 ARCADE RD 02121
OWNER	DIXON KAFI M
	ASSESSOR'S REPORT <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	PROPERTY VIEWER <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	ZONING
ZONING DISTRICT	Dorchester Neighborhood
ZONING SUBDISTRICT	3F-15000
SUBDISTRICT TYPE	Medium Residential
	ZONING OVERLAYS

## LAND OWNERSHIP STATUS



Whether you're interested in urban farming or wondering what to do with an empty lot, it's important to first understand the property's ownership status. A parcel can be publicly or privately owned. Public ownership could be held by the City of Boston, state, or federal agencies. You can check the ownership status of a lot by looking up an address on the Boston Zoning Viewer, which lists property details including the owner's name.<sup>4</sup>

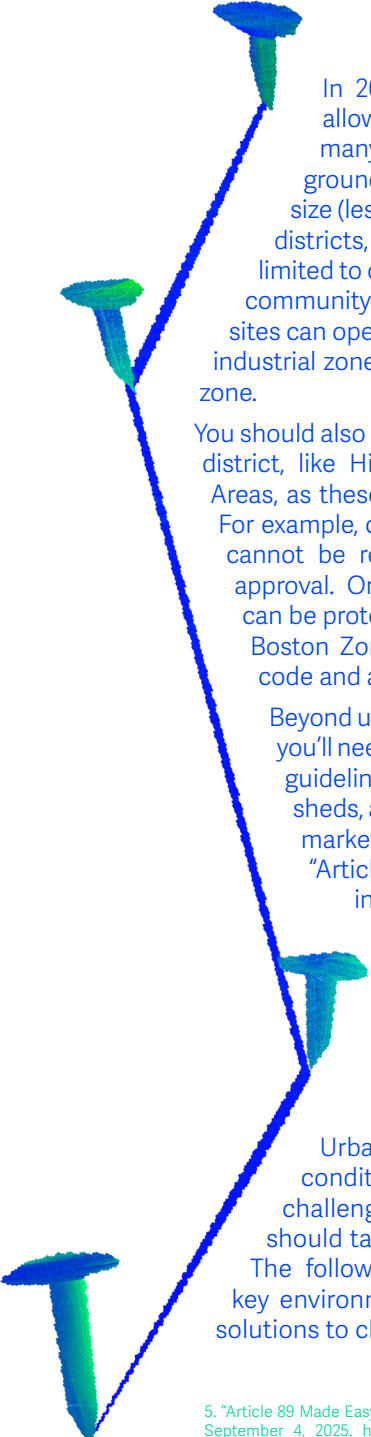
If you determine that the parcel is City-owned, you should contact GrowBoston, the City's office for urban agriculture, to learn if that parcel is available for urban farming. If the site is already slated for a project, the office can help you identify alternative, available land. See Appendix A for more on earmarking in Boston. If a parcel is privately owned, you'll need to approach the owner for access permission, a lease, or purchase to farm on the land. In all cases, you'll need to start by clarifying the land's legal status.

## ZONING AND LAND USE

Every parcel in Boston is designated by zone, which governs the activities that can occur within its boundaries. Before putting roots in the ground, you must confirm that your desired site's zone allows urban farming uses. Zoning doesn't cover every detail, but it's the first hurdle: ensure farming is an allowed use by right or determine whether special permitting or a zoning variance may be required.

4. "Zoning Viewer | City Of Boston Planning Department." Accessed September 4, 2025. <https://maps.bostonplans.org/zoningviewer/>.





In 2013, Boston adopted Article 89, which allows urban agriculture and gardening in many parts of the city. Under Article 89, ground-level urban farms of small and medium size (less than one acre) are allowed in all zoning districts, while large farms (over an acre) are limited to certain zones or require permitting. Most community gardens and small urban agriculture sites can operate legally in residential, commercial, or industrial zones, but you should still confirm your lot's zone.

You should also confirm whether the lot lies in an overlay district, like Historic Districts or Wetlands Resource Areas, as these may impose additional rules on a site. For example, conservation land or dedicated parkland cannot be repurposed for farming without official approval. On the other hand, community gardens can be protected under open space zoning. Use the Boston Zoning Viewer to find the parcel's zoning code and any special overlay zones.

Beyond use permissions, Article 89 sets standards you'll need to follow. For example, there are design guidelines for structures like greenhouses and sheds, as well as rules for farm stands or farmers' markets on site. It may be helpful to read the "Article 89 Made Easy" guide, which explains in plain language how zoning applies to various urban agriculture activities.<sup>5</sup>

## **ASSESS ENVIRONMENTAL CONDITIONS, DIFFICULTIES & SOLUTIONS**

Urban lots come with environmental conditions that can make farming challenging. Before you begin growing, you should take stock of the conditions on your site. The following diagrams provide an overview of key environmental conditions, along with possible solutions to challenges that may hinder farming.

5. "Article 89 Made Easy: Urban Agriculture Zoning For The City of Boston." Accessed September 4, 2025. <https://www.boston.gov/sites/default/files/buildinghousing/project/flint-street-urban-farm/attachment/document/0698b0000QrVSwAAN.pdf>.

## **CONSIDER YOUR FARM'S GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE**

Consider: will this lot operate as a personal or family-run farm, a nonprofit community garden, a cooperative, or a for-profit business?

In Boston, each model comes with different implications for funding opportunities, decision-making, and city support. For example, nonprofit or community-based organizations are eligible for City grants and technical assistance, but a private enterprise must rely on sales or private investment. A cooperative model empowers multiple members with ownership, but it is not necessarily eligible for city funding and technical support.

## **SOLE PROPRIETORSHIP:**

If you plan to start small and be the only operator, you can run the farm as an individual (sole proprietor) without creating a separate legal entity. However, a sole proprietorship does not protect you from liability and it can be harder to raise funds. For instance, you typically wouldn't qualify for Boston city grants. This model might suit a very small-scale farm in the beginning, but most urban farm projects will formalize beyond this if they grow.

## **LIMITED LIABILITY COMPANY:**

Many urban farms that intend to sell produce commercially choose to form a business entity. The most common such entity is a Limited Liability Company (LLC) registered in Massachusetts. Creating an LLC establishes a legal separation between the farm's finances and liabilities, and your personal finances.

This structure is suitable if you are starting a farm enterprise, perhaps with partners or investors. It allows you to open a business bank account, sign leases or contracts in the farm's name, and hire employees. Keep in mind, running a business means maintaining records, paying any applicable taxes, and possibly obtaining insurance for farming activities.

## NON-PROFIT:

In Boston, being a for-profit does not exclude you from land access, but most governmental financial supports are geared towards nonprofits. Still, commercial urban farms can thrive – farmers' markets, restaurant sales, or CSA (community-supported agriculture) customers are viable options for business sustainability.

If your urban farm's mission is educational, community-focused, or aimed at improving food access, you might choose to form a nonprofit. A nonprofit corporation (or 501(c)(3) tax-exempt status) can fundraise through grants and donations. In fact, GrowBoston's Grassroots Program generally requires applicants to operate as a nonprofit or to partner with one. Many community gardens and teaching farms use this model.

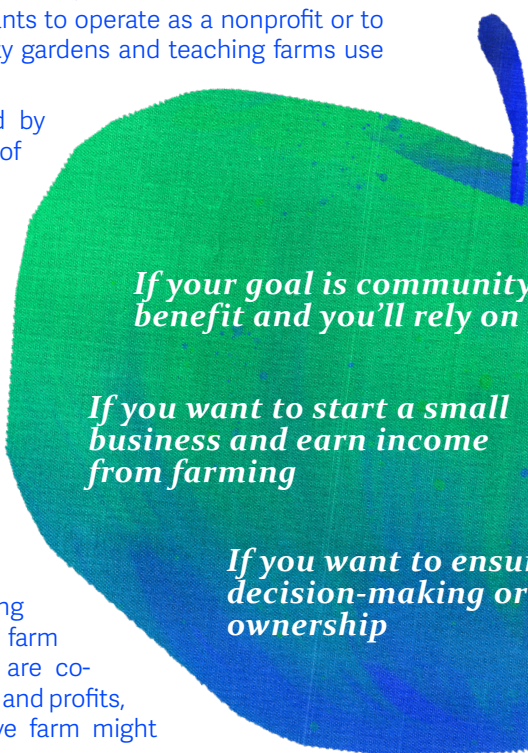
Nonprofits are typically governed by a board, sometimes by a group of community advisors. Building strong community credibility and volunteer networks are essential to the success of an urban farm – and the City of Boston may look more favorably on your project if the farm is demonstrably an asset to its community.

## CO-OPS:

A cooperative is an organization owned and governed by its members, who could be workers or consumers. In the urban farming context, a worker cooperative farm means that farmers and/or staff are co-owners and share decision-making and profits, whereas a community cooperative farm might involve investment from neighbors.

A co-op can choose to be non-profit or for-profit depending on its setup. A co-op farm can be a 501(c)(3), or an LLC structured cooperatively – what matters is the governance principle of shared ownership.

While not as common as other models, the cooperative structure offers unique advantages that make it worth consideration. It places greater value on democratic decision-making and can be critical



*If your goal is community benefit and you'll rely on*

*If you want to start a small business and earn income from farming*

*If you want to ensure decision-making or ownership*

to developing long-term community ownership. Beyond shared governance, cooperatives can strengthen neighborhood cohesion, build local leadership, and foster collective responsibility.

In historically marginalized communities, the co-op model can also act as a buffer against displacement and gentrification, helping ensure that the benefits of urban farming - such as access to fresh food, green space, and economic opportunity - remain rooted in the community.

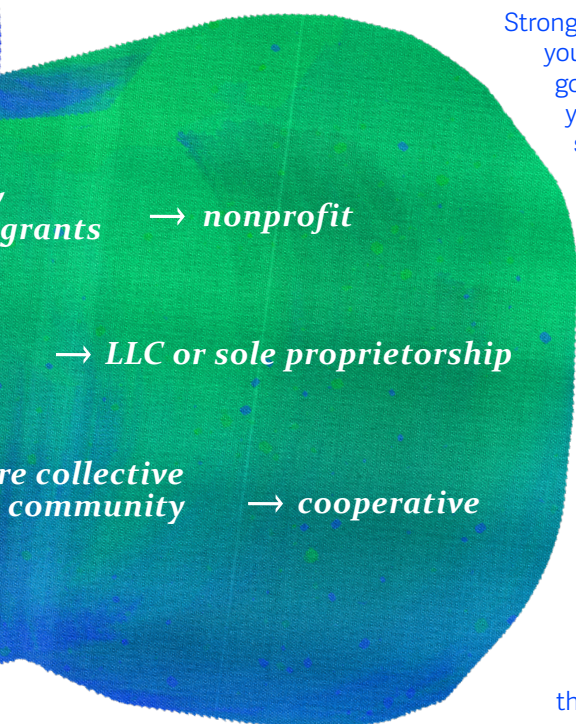
## MAKING DECISIONS ABOUT A GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE

Strong foundations are built when you make decisions about governance early on. When you decide on a governance structure, consider your farm's purpose, scale, and who is involved.

Urban farming in Boston can be funded through a mix of city grants, state programs, private fundraising, and community contributions.

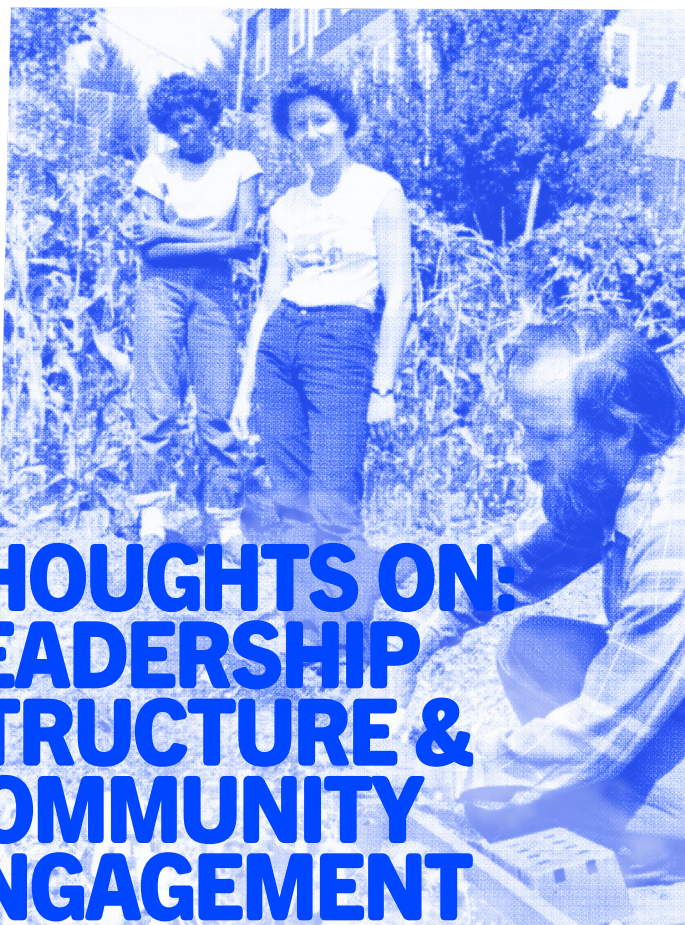
See Appendix B for more details on funding. You should also keep in mind regulatory and tax implications. For example, nonprofits are tax-exempt but cannot distribute profits; businesses can make profits but pay taxes. Further down the line, you should consult with an attorney or business advisor familiar with Massachusetts law if

you have further questions about your governance structure.<sup>6</sup>



6. Rural Development. "For Cooperatives." January 10, 2015. <https://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/cooperatives>.

Samuel Kayman and Martha Walker, 1978-1986. Photo by Read D. Brugger.



# THOUGHTS ON: LEADERSHIP STRUCTURE & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT



**Urban farming is not just about plants and infrastructure – it's about people. Successful farming projects pay as much attention to the leadership structure and community engagement as they do to soil and seeds.**

Establish how decisions will be made on the farm. If the farm has multiple organizers or members, consider forming a garden committee or board that meets regularly. Consider defining roles like a coordinator (point person for day-to-day issues), a treasurer (if handling funds), or a volunteer coordinator. Setting up ground rules for the farm is wise – for example, how new members join, how plots are assigned, how conflict is resolved, and who is responsible for maintenance activities.

It is equally important to engage with a farm's surrounding community. Boston's approach to urban agriculture strongly emphasizes neighborhood input. In fact, the city often requires a community engagement process before granting land access. For any City-owned site, you will need to engage community members, neighborhood associations, and other stakeholders on your farm proposal.

Start on your block: talk to next door residents, listen to any concerns (presence of rats, appearance of the farm, etc.), and consider how you can respond to and incorporate their feedback. The Mayor's Office of Housing typically hosts a formal community meeting for projects on City land, but it's encouraged that you informally conduct outreach prior to a formal meeting. Even on private land, a courtesy outreach to neighbors can prevent future conflict and build goodwill.

Sustained community participation in the farm's operation can ensure long-term ownership, accountability, and collective benefit. Will the farm host open hours for the public to visit or harvest crops? Will the farm organize events like harvest festivals, workshops, or barbecues to encourage community development? A sense of ownership among all participants is key; a garden can quickly become a valued community hub if people feel invited.





# **LAND TENURE: URBAN AGRICULTURE IN BOSTON**

Land tenure determines your right to occupy a site and to legally use it for farming. In urban settings, farm tenure can take the form of ownership, property lease, or occupancy through a land trust or conservation easement.

The long-term security of an urban farm depends on both land tenure and the site's zone. A garden on land where farming isn't allowed and with no legal right to occupy offers the least protection. A lease agreement in a permitted area offers moderate protection. Ideally, the most secure arrangement is ownership of land zoned for agriculture, or when it is required that land use stays as farming despite ownership changes.

### ***GrowBoston, Grassroots Program.***

In Boston, groups can access City-owned land through the Grassroots Program. When a lot becomes available, the City issues a Request for Proposals (RFP) for groups to apply. The subsequent process involves community engagement, proposal review, and approval by the Public Facilities Commission, and can take over a year. However, it is valuable to reach out proactively, ahead of an active RFP. This way, you and/or your organization will already be on GrowBoston's radar after you apply.

### ***Open Space Zoning Districts.***

Community gardens can gain long-term protection through designation as Open Space - Community Garden (OS-G) subdistricts under Article 33. This zoning classification restricts development and ensures land remains dedicated to open space use. Changes to use require public hearings and approval from

the Boston Zoning Commission, offering a strong safeguard against displacement. OS-G zoning is often applied to city-owned or trust-managed land but can, with care, include private parcels.

### ***Leasing or Buying Land.***

Urban farms often operate on land that is leased or purchased from public or private owners. In Boston, underutilized land held by individuals, institutions (such as churches, colleges, and hospitals), or even public agencies may be available for urban farming. Leasing allows for lower entry costs but requires clear terms and sufficient duration to ensure the stability of the farm. Long-term leases or renewable agreements are ideal, but ownership provides the greatest security. However, the substantial capital and legal support may not be accessible to all looking to start a farm.

### ***Conservation Easements and Land Trusts.***

Conservation easements are legal

agreements that restrict future development on a piece of land to preserve its agricultural, scenic, or open space value. While the land remains under private or nonprofit ownership, the easement “runs with the land,” binding future owners to its protections.

Easements can be held by land trusts or government agencies. Land trusts are nonprofit organizations that acquire or manage land - or conservation easements - to ensure its long-term protection for community use. They can preserve land for farming and gardening, taking it off the real estate market, away from speculation. Land trusts or government agencies typically hold title to the land, while community members commit to its ongoing care. However, because the trust holds

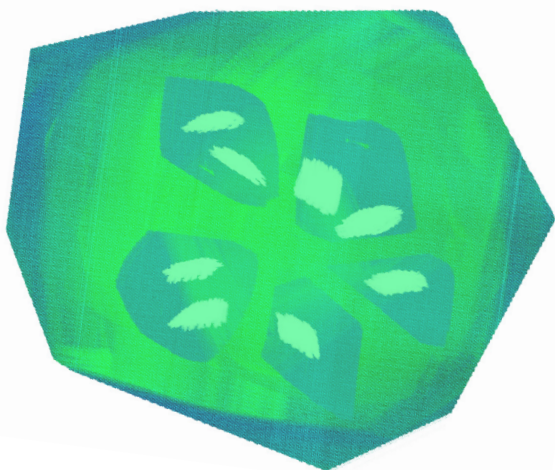
Common land tenure arrangements include:

**Fee simple ownership.** Owning the land outright via deed. This gives maximum control and long-term security, but you assume full responsibility (including taxes and liabilities) and have the resources to purchase the property.

**Leasehold.** A contract to rent the land for a defined period. A lease grants you the right to use the land while the landlord retains ownership. You should ensure that a lease explicitly allows agriculture and consider renewal options.

**License.** A temporary, revocable permission to use the land. A license is often short-term and offers the least security. The City of Boston sometimes issues licenses for interim use of vacant lots until a permanent plan is in place.

ownership, farmers must operate under the land trust's rules, which may limit the farm's autonomy.





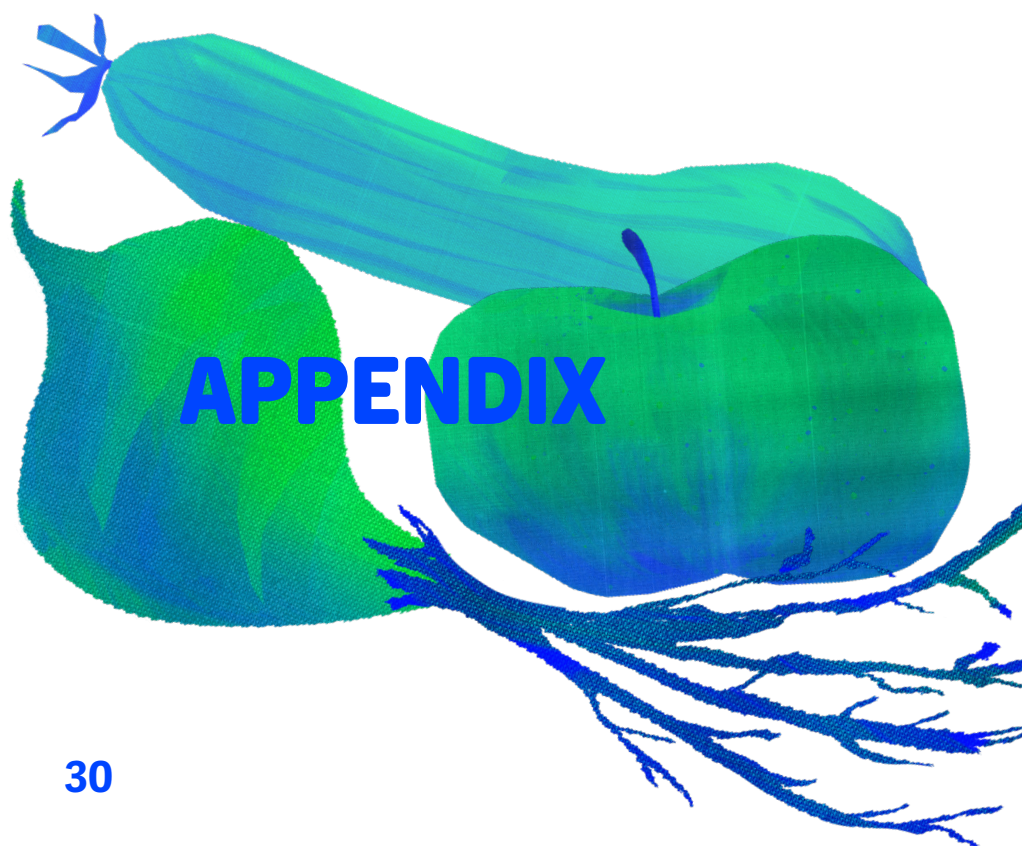
# NOT READY TO FULLY COMMIT?

**Join an Existing Urban Farm or Community Garden.** Boston has several urban farms and community gardens. Joining one is a great way to garden without managing a full site - you can simply get your own plot or help with communal areas by volunteering. Check the City of Boston's Community Garden and Urban Farm Directory to find one in your neighborhood!

**Start a Home or Rooftop Garden.** Starting a garden at home - in a yard, balcony, or rooftop - is an easy and flexible way to grow food without needing public land. Raised beds or container gardens can yield fresh produce and require only basic materials. Home gardening is a great way to build skills, reduce food costs, and connect with nature on your own terms. If you're considering this - make sure to consult Article 89, which outlines what's permitted for rooftop and residential growing. In addition, GrowBoston frequently offers funding to support home gardeners with grants for supplies.

**Focus on Specific Skills or Crops.** You don't need to run a farm to participate in urban agriculture. Many people specialize in one area, like:

- **Beekeeping:** Boston allows backyard hives with registration. Bees support pollination citywide, and groups like the Boston Area Beekeepers Association offer training.<sup>7</sup>
- **Chicken Keeping:** It's great for eggs, compost, and community sharing - just be sure to check Article 89 for limits on the number of hens allowed.
- **Composting:** Master composting helps supply gardens with healthy soil. Community bins and City programs make this easy to start.
- **Specialty Crops:** Grow mushrooms, microgreens, or fruit trees with minimal space and equipment. These skills are portable and often marketable.
- **Education & Advocacy:** Get involved in educational programs run by urban farms, non-profits, or universities to help teach gardening skills and support others in growing gardens.



# A. EARMARKING

## *What is earmarking? Why does it matter?*

When a site is earmarked, this means that land has been reserved or prioritized for specific development projects, like affordable housing or municipal facilities. Although a lot may appear empty, if it is earmarked, future redevelopment plans could disrupt or even subject your future farm to eviction, making long-term agricultural planning difficult. Confirming a lot's earmark status early on can save you time and resources on a site with an uncertain tenure.

## *Is earmarking a public process?*

Earmarking can sometimes be public information. Large-scale city plans, zoning amendments, and Requests for Proposals (RFPs) are frequently accessible online and may give you information on earmarked sites. However, this is not a guarantee, so do not rely solely on these documents. Sometimes a sign on a lot or a notice in the neighborhood will indicate planned development. Even still, preliminary internal decisions may not be disclosed until plans become more official.

## *How can I check if a lot is earmarked?*

To confirm whether a lot is earmarked, use the following City of Boston resources:

Contact the Grassroots Program at GrowBoston. Send an email to the Grassroots Program Manager ([theresa.strachila@boston.gov](mailto:theresa.strachila@boston.gov)) to ask if a parcel is already in a pre-development phase for another project.

- City of Boston, Assessing Department [Property Assessment Database](#). Check basic parcel details, ownership status, zoning, and current permitted uses.
- City of Boston, Mayor's Office of Housing (MOH) [Building in Boston Map](#). Provides detailed public records of all active development projects, city-owned land (inactive MOH land), and land that MOH is planning to sell for revenue to fund additional affordable housing.
- City of Boston, Planning Department [Zoning Viewer Map](#). Interactive maps showing zoning status, planned development projects, and proposed zoning changes.

### ***What can you do if the lot is earmarked?***

An earmarked lot will introduce a degree of uncertainty to the future of your farm. Remember to keep this in mind as you consider your options.

- Request a temporary lease from GrowBoston. A short-term lease will allow you to farm temporarily until the earmarked project begins development and construction. Currently, the City of Boston does not provide a standardized or public-facing application process for leases for urban agriculture. Instead, access to city-owned land for short-term use is negotiated directly with GrowBoston, so you should send them an email ([growboston@boston.gov](mailto:growboston@boston.gov)) to begin the conversation.
- Find an alternative parcel. Explore other vacant city-owned lots that are not earmarked or are available for long-term use. GrowBoston can also support this process.
- Rezoning. With community support for permanent farming on an already earmarked parcel, a rezoning proposal could be submitted to the Planning Department. This option will require political backing and can take over a year. However, there is still no guarantee for long-term tenure, as another entity could also pursue another rezoning in the future.



# B. FUNDING AND RESOURCES

**At the City of Boston.** Start by exploring Boston programs dedicated to urban agriculture. The Grassroots Open Space Program offers capital grants (often up to \$150,000) for community gardens and urban farms, especially in low-income neighborhoods. Through an annual request for proposals, Grassroots awards funding and access to city-owned land, reflecting the City's commitment to expanding green space and food access. You should also look into Community Preservation Act (CPA) open space funding, as the CPA has funded many garden renovations and new garden development in Boston.

**State and Federal funding.** Beyond city hall, consider state and federal grants. Massachusetts' Department of Agricultural Resources and the US Department of Agriculture run multiple urban agriculture grant programs to support community-scale farming initiatives. Grants often require a solid proposal, a budget, and a track record of established partnerships, so start early. Build relationships with local nonprofits or community organizations—this will strengthen your grant application.

**Go local.** Don't overlook grassroots fundraising and local support. Some urban farms in Boston raise money through community fundraising events, crowdfunding

campaigns, or partnerships with local businesses. You might host a farm-to-table dinner, plant sale, or online fundraiser to collect startup funds. These kinds of events can also double as community engagement.

**Institutional support.** Universities sometimes offer technical assistance. Local foundations or corporations sometimes have small grant programs for community health, environmental justice, or youth development that your project might advance. It's always worth reaching out and asking!

**In-kind resources.** These can take the shape of materials or technical help. For instance, GrowBoston's Raised Bed Program provides free raised bed kits and soil to residents who apply. Some nonprofits may share tools, compost, plants, or expertise. By joining the network of community-based organizations, you can unlock a wealth of shared resources.

And finally, ensure that your governing structure can legally receive funds, and that funding opportunities are aligned with your project goals. In recent years in Boston, some policy has focused on climate resilience and food justice; urban farming projects that address these issues are well-positioned in applications for funding and support from the city.



# RESOURCES

[Article 89 Made Easy: Urban Agriculture Zoning for The City of Boston](#)

[City of Boston's Assessing Online](#) (Property Assessment Database)

[Boston Tax Parcel Viewer](#) (Property Assessment Map)

[Boston Zoning Viewer](#) (Zoning Map)

[Community Preservation](#) in the City of Boston

[Grants and Opportunities](#) at the USDA

[GrowBoston](#) at the City of Boston

# IMAGES

[Cooperatives](#) at the USDA

["Domingo Fernandez Stands besides 'Handicapped Garden' Sign, 1991."](#)

["Group Gathers around Fir Tree, 1983."](#)

["Jim Hall with Sunflower, 1985."](#)

["Samuel Kaymen Demonstrates Gardening Techniques to Urban Farmers Martha Walker and Sue Naiman."](#)

["Resilient Boston Harbor | Boston.Gov."](#)